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AUTHOR	Aeschliman, Sandra
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ABSTRACT

Involving parents in young children's literacy development is a challenge being met by many school districts. Several programs and strategies are being used at various levels to enhance literacy development and to address literacy needs of parents. Suggestions for preschool children include playing classical music, participating in meaningful learning experiences, and reading aloud. In addition, Even Start and Mothers Understanding Methods of Schooling are effective family-based literacy programs. Strategies for use with elementary school students and their parents include: morning meetings for parents at school to share information and present cooperative ventures; home visitor teams to bring parents into school; Reading (or Math) Family Nights; Family Technology Resource Centers offering child care and computer and literacy training; and the hiring of parents as ombudsmen. Strategies tried at the secondary school level include general school improvement programs with parent components, using parents as reading tutors, the Brotherhood of Super Stars for African-American males, church-based parent centers, and providing preparation for parent-teacher conferences. (KB)

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Parents and Teachers: Education in Concert

by

Sandra Aeschliman

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Heschliman

Parents and Teachers: Education in Concert

Many schools have difficulty involving parents in the educational process; other schools have remarkable success. Often these success stories began with a need, noted and finally met. The real success story doesn't lie within these processes. It lies in the lives of children.

The child's literacy development begins long before formal schooling, so it is the parent who can begin the road to education. The pre-school child depends on scaffolding, guided assistance from adults. Parents are encouraged to play classical music (especially baroque), engage in a range of interactive settings (church, neighborhood), participate in meaningful learning experiences (trips—both near and far), and especially to read aloud (Ramsburg).

Programs that address pre-school needs may need to address literacy needs of parents. Two such series are Even Start and MUMS. Even Start is a family-based literacy program that integrates early childhood education and adult education into a unified program. It has great impact on availabity of reading materials in the home, parents' expectations of success in school, and skills related to children's readiness for school (Snow, 146). MUMS, Mothers Understanding Methods of Schooling, is a Canadian-based program in which staff members visit mothers with pre-school children. They demonstrate activities, usually centered around books and exercise sheets, which the mothers then continue between visits. (Landers). Obviously, such programs prepare parents to be ready to be partners in education.

The early elementary years will hopefully build on the child's [illegible] foundation. As formal schooling begins, parents and schools must aim for good communication and cooperation. Title I funds provide federal funds for schools populated by students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. One percent of the alloted money must go to measures that encourage parent involvement. Principals may host "Muffins for Moms" or "Doughnuts for Dads," usually early- or mid-morning, casual gatherings that can be used toward specific purposes--sharing test scores, explaining reading programs, presenting possibilities for cooperative ventures at home, etc. It is certainly an appropriate vehicle for explaining FAME, the daily activity planner that helps students prepare for the ITBS (Harris-Wright), or the Megaskills Program, which teaches parents how to help their children develop responsibility, motivation, and other skills that lead to school success. (N.Central). An additional presentation compiled by Eleanor Macfarlane gives practical teaching tips for parents and lends itself to a school presentation in a casual setting (Macfarlane). Should the parent want to tackle math and writing issues, *Parent Talk* magazine presents a helpful approach that offers both simple and more complicated tutoring (*Parent Talk*). The role of parents in helping children cope with frustration in school should not be overlooked (Katz). An end-of-school meeting might introduce NPIN's "Summertime Funtime Activities," easily followed and enjoyable for both parent and child (OERI).

Boston uses dedicated home visitor teams to bring parents into the school more often. This has resulted in more than 90% of all families meeting with their children's teacher at least twice a year. (Palanki)) Similarly, the TransParent School Model provides recorded messages about homework and classroom events for parents, and parents then record their responses. (N.Central).

Ms. Karen Maultsby recommends beginning with a time preference sheet, posted on Registration Day and checked (before school/ mid-morning/ noon/ after school) to help plan activites. Before school and mid-morning could duplicate the "Muffins" and "Doughnuts," but she suggests emphasizing only ***good news*** the first time the parent comes. A main objective would be to make the school setting non-threatening. (Groups can be divided by grade or groups of grades --K-2, 3-5--, if desirable.) A noon setting could begin with the parent's sharing lunch with his or her child, then moving to the library for a short, casual presentation. One of Ms. Maultsby's most successful programs is Reading Family Night (or Math Family Night) once a month. Various approaches are used. Sometimes families meet in the library and read aloud to each other; other times a choral reading is presented by students; or perhaps a reading exercise will result in a "make-n-take" project. Light snacks are provided by teachers, and only one hour (6:30 - 7:30) is used (Maultsby).

An original program for which DeKalb County is justly proud is the Family Technology Resource Centers, proposed and implemented in 1996. Presently housed in mostly elementary schools and located in communities where low test scores, juvenile crime and teenage pregnancy rates are high, once non-involved parents have exhibited enthusiasm, evidenced by some 2,000 adults now waiting to participate. All ages are invited, and all ages appear to be represented. The centers offer free child care and computer training in job-related technical fields, basic and advanced literacy skills, and personal computing skills. Laptops are available for borrowing. Incentives include a Certificate of Completion suitable for job applications, DeKalb College credit, and the possibility of "earning" a computer. Increased membership and participation in PTA-sponsored activities and programs, increased volunteer hours, parental involvement in homework, and increased home-school contact are some salient benefits (Brown). This is undoubtedly the "shared responsibility" noted in our text (Wepner, 192).

Such programs bring benefits to the post-elementary student as well. The middle school student shows signs of maturity; school building and format change; parent and faculty may be replaced by peer influence. SEARCH Institute's "30 Keys to Successful Furure for Teens" lists in its top 16 "external assets," (#1) a warm, caring family, (#2) approachable parents, (#3) communicative parents, (#7) parental involvement in school, (#8) parental standards, (#9) parental discipline, and (#10) parental monitoring. The role of the parent in the student's education remains crucial.

One school organized a neighborhood tutorial program. Adult volunteers were present every evening in a variety of locations—the school library, local churches, neighborhood library branch, community rooms in apartment complexes, local recreation centers—to help students with schoolwor[illegible]. Within three months, around 400 students a week were using this resource (Williamson).

A Richmond school hired a parent to act as an official ombudsman.. He or she became the parent liaison to the principal or superintendent, helping solve problems and improve communications (*Richmond*). Such a person can sometimes assist as communication with pre-teens and teens becomes more difficult.

In Minneapolis telephones and answering machines were installed in middle school classrooms, resulting in more communication for parents and teachers (Palanki).

It is, of course, the high school student who seems most vulnerable to outside pressures, most disdainful of parents' roles, but who most needs the security that comes with parental involvement in the school. It is often the caring teacher/faculty that facilitates such involvement. Programs such as James Comer's School Development Program, Henry Levin's Accelerated Schools Project, and Don Davies' The League of Schools Reaching Out all describe general school improvement programs that have parent components (N. Central).

Reading Specialist Marti Macon-Gee issues an open invitation to parents to visit her reading lab at any time and sit next to their children. This is recommended in our text as well (Wepner, 191). She also institutes a parent telephone chain called the "Did-you-know Chain" that circulates relevant school information to parents (SAT prep, pilot projects, recent awards, etc.) She has even asked certain parents to help co-sponsor some of the school's clubs. Students then see the partnership of teachers and parents in action. Parents are visible within the school (Macon-Gee).

Reading Specialist Elizabeth Filiat has seen remarkable results at Southwest DeKalb after she made an impassioned plea at a PTA meeting and through the PTA newsletter. She first explained the dismal reading scores, then assured those in attendance that she wanted to use every measure possible to help those students, and finally proposed a before-school reading program, which she calls simply "The Morning Tutorial." Parents (who first take part in a short, intensive training session) come to the school from 7:00 - 8:00 A.M., four days a week, and work individually with students in the reading lab.

Seventy-five students have taken advantage of the program, and word of mouth has brought in volunteers from churches and other parts of the community (Filiat).

A success-in-high-school program specifically for African-American Males, is BOSS—Brotherhood of Super Stars. This group meets twice monthly in a school setting and has a parent support group that meets bi-monthly. Concerned primarily with appropriate, same-sex role models, a secondary goal is to create a strengthened bond with parents. Though very effective, only twenty males in grades eleven and twelve can take part each year. Though relatively new, notable success has been achieved with this program (Wilson).

A West Virginia school reaches out to the community through a church-based parent center, parent-to-parent phone chain, and home visits which have resulted in more parent involvement and optimism about college as a viable option after high school (Palanki).

Coordinator for Gifted Students Mary Ann Schrecengost and former Head Counselor at Cedar Grove High, Evelyn Ackermann, emphasize the role of the parent for the gifted student. Specific preparation for parent-teacher conferences is suggested in *Parenting for High Potential* (NAGC). Ms. Schrecengost added that the parents of gifted students must be concerned with college choice, and thus should keep in close contact with counselors as early as ninth grade. She spoke of the EQUITY 2000 program that invites parents to attend workshops that explore financial aid, career awareness, adolescent development, and family math (College Board Review, Spring 1998).

This paper has not exhausted ideas or possibilities. In the programs mentioned, parent involvement is an integral part of the program, not just a convenient "add-on." It is conducted comprehensively, as an investment to reap rewards throughout the school year. It is likewise approached systematically, not as a "one-shot" effort by only a few in the education field. (Wepner, 180). Needs have been assessed, followed by thorough planning. After program implementation, complete evaluation completes the initial cycle (Wepner, 187). ". . . Reading programs that seek to establish a strong and positive partnership with parents . . . are those that promote reading as more than just a school-related subject; students are provided with innumerable opportunities to make reading a very natural part of their everyday lives" (Wepner, 178).

With correct implementation, programs to include and involve parents pay great rewards. It is incumbent on both parents and teachers to make such programs available.

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